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OPINION

The CIA—covering up Moscow's trail of murder



ALLAN
BROWNFELD

The controversy is growing — as well it should — over allegations that the CIA has been downplaying the growing evidence which involves the KGB in the attempted assassination of Pope Paul II.

In a nationwide TV program which aired Jan. 25, NBC correspondent Marvin Kalb said that CIA officials were trying to cover up the matter because evidence of KGB involvement in the plot would "shatter hopes for detente, trade and arms agreements" with the Soviets.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, D-N.Y., accused CIA Director William Casey of covering up the Soviet-Bulgarian connection. Upon his return from Rome on Feb. 9, he revealed that Italian authorities told him they were "shocked" by the way the CIA was trying to "obstruct and deflect" the investigation of the Bulgarian connection to the assassination attempt. "I was told that the CIA is using disinformation and all sorts of other tactics to divert, dissuade and actually block this investigation," D'Amato said.

D'Amato warned

Asked if he thought that CIA Director Casey himself was involved in the coverup, D'Amato said, "Yes." He reported that U.S. Embassy officials in Rome did everything they could to prevent him from investigating the matter himself. He said that U.S. Ambassador Max Raab sent him a telegram before he left saying, "Don't come." In addition, a staff member

of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee was prevented from going with him on the trip because of CIA pressure.

Sen. D'Amato called the CIA's efforts "shockingly inept" and said that he had been told by a senior agency official in Rome that "not one person has been assigned to follow developments in the case."

Another member of Congress, Rep. Larry McDonald, D-Ga., has called upon the Reagan administration and the Congress to investigate allegations that the United States attempted to suppress investigations linking the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II to the KGB. In letters to President Reagan, CIA Director Casey and Rep. Edward Boland, D-Mass., chairman of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, McDonald said that there is mounting evidence that the KGB was either directly involved in the attempt or at least knew the attempted assassination would occur. He said that there is also evidence that the CIA tried to suppress the efforts of newsmen and Italian authorities to link the KGB with the attempt on the pope's life.

Those in the know

Those in a position to know express little doubt that Moscow is deeply involved. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski have both said that the well-established Bulgarian connection of Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who pulled the trigger, leads directly to the Soviet Union and its current leader, Yuri Andropov, who was then head of the KGB. "It had to be the Soviets," Kissinger said. "The Bulgarians had no interest in coming after the Pope."

The CIA — and the president himself — seems to be ignoring the growing body of evidence leading to the conclusion that Moscow was indeed involved in the assassination attempt. In an interview with the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, the former No. 2 man in Bulgaria's state spy service said that he is certain that Moscow was behind the shooting of the pope. Stefan Svrtlev, who in 1972 became second in command of the KDS, which is directly tied to the KGB, said: "I haven't the least doubt about the participation of the Bulgarians in this plot."

Svrtlev, who defected to the West in the late 1970s, pointed out that this operation would not have been decided by the Bulgarians alone since Bulgaria had no particular reason to eliminate the pope. The Russians, he declared, were certainly behind it. Asked if Bulgaria could have undertaken this operation alone, he replied: "Absolutely not ... The departments I and II — specializing in espionage and counter-espionage — are both completely controlled by Soviet advisers ... All the secret services of the Eastern bloc are simply branches of the KGB, which we call the center ... Based on my experience in the secret service, I am certain that the plot against the life of John Paul II came from an order from Leonid Brezhnev and was organized by Yuri Andropov ... This isn't in any way the first time such a procedure was followed."

Strangely incredulous

Why does the CIA — and others in this administration — believe that it is unlikely that the KGB was

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